

February 27, 2024

Esteemed Chairs Lopes and Gresko,
Members of the Environment Committee:

The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) appreciates the opportunity to comment on Bill 5218, *An Act Concerning the Establishment of Riparian Buffers and Revision of Certain Inland Wetlands Provisions*.

WestCOG **supports** this bill, especially the creation of minimum standards at the state level for setbacks from surface waters. WestCOG's extensive work in this area, which includes a [91-page report documenting the science and application of riparian buffer protections](#), found that Connecticut badly lags peers states. **Connecticut is the only state in New England that lacks protection of riparian buffers in state law; indeed, dozens of states across the nation have adopted statewide minimum riparian buffers – regardless of the party or politics in office.**

In contrast with these states, which have set science-based riparian protections at the state level, Connecticut pushes full responsibility for buffering surface waters onto municipalities, resulting in a situation where one side of a river may have a generous setback, and the other side has none. While some locations may be more ecologically sensitive than others (and thus peer states allow municipalities to exceed the minimums via local regulation) **there is no scientific basis for the crazy quilt of standards that has resulted from Connecticut's failure to regulate in this area.**

Riparian buffers provide many benefits (and they do so at a lower cost than engineered solutions). These benefits include:

- **Improved water quality** through dramatic reductions in pollutant discharges into watercourses and soil stabilization/erosion control
- Improved compliance with EPA water quality standards and consent orders
- **Decreased flood** frequency and magnitude through reductions in stormwater discharges
- **Reduced risk to life and property damage**
- Lower flood insurance premiums
- **Groundwater recharge**, replenishing aquifers (that may be used for drinking water)
- Habitat and corridors for terrestrial wildlife
- Shade, shelter, and food for fish and other aquatic organisms
- Support of recreation, agriculture, and the "blue" economy

While these benefits have led some municipalities to adopt their own riparian buffer regulations, local regulations are no substitute for state minimums. Without state minimums, a river is only as clean and resilient to floods as its most poorly managed reaches; a community that adopts robust local standards will still experience water quality degradation and heightened flood risk if its upstream neighbors do nothing. As the aphorism goes, "water flows downhill."

The climate is changing, and with it the need for riparian buffers to literally buffer us against the increasingly extreme weather such change is bringing – including heavy downpours and droughts – will grow. It is time for Connecticut to join dozens of other states in recognizing the proven value of riparian buffers by adopting science-based minimum standards at the state level.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Francis Pickering". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Francis R. Pickering
Executive Director